

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BANGKO 07989 030638Z

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ACTION SS-25

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3721

S E C R E T BANGKOK 7989

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: XGDS-3

TAGS: MASS, TH

SUBJECT: DISPOSITION OF FORMER GVN US-SUPPLIED AIRCRAFT

1. AS EXPECTED, POLITICAL FUROR OVER DISPOSITION OF FORMER GVN MILITARY EQUIPMENT WHICH WAS PROVIDED BY U.S. AND IS NOW IN THAILAND IS GROWING. SITUATION COMPLICATED MAY 3 BY LARGE PRESS PLAY IN THAILAND TO HANOI STATEMENT THAT THAILAND SHOULD "MANIFEST ITS GOOD WILL" BY TURNING OVER TO THE PRG ALL FORMER MILITARY EQUIPMENT OF THE GVN NOW LOCATED IN THAILAND. FOREIGN MINISTRY SPOKESMEN ARE SUPPORTING THIS POSITION AND THE BANGKOK "NATION" STRONGLY URGES THAT IT "IS THE DUTY OF THE THAI GOVERNMENT TO IMPOUND ALL THESE AIRCRAFT" PENDING A DECISION ON THEIR ULTIMATE DISPOSITION.

2. AS REPORTED BANGKOK 7976, WE ARE MOVING FORMER GVN MATERIEL OUT OF UTAPAO WITH THE APPROVAL OF THE RTG SUPREME COMMAND AND ON THE BASIS OF A PUBLIC STATEMENT BY DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER OF DEFENSE PRAMARN THAT THIS EQUIPMENT WAS BEING TURNED OVER TO THE USG FOR DISPOSITION.

3. THE MIDWAY IS LYING OFF BANGKOK THIS MORNING AND LOADING OF F5E'S AND A-37'S WILL BEGIN AS SOON AS WEATHER PERMITS. I HAVE INSTRUCTED MACTHAI TO TAKE FURTHER STEPS WHICH MAY BE REQUIRED TO MOVE MAXIMUM AMOUNT OF MAJOR GVN ITEMS OUT OF THAILAND THIS WEEKEND. THERE IS GROWING DANGER THAT THIS EQUIPMENT WILL BECOME A PAWN AND WE WILL GET

SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 02 BANGKO 07989 030638Z

CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF POLITICAL MANEUVERING BETWEEN

BANGKOK AND HANOI. AS RESULT, I HAVE DECIDED IT IS IN OUR INTERESTS TO MOVE QUICKLY ON THE BASIS OF THE APPROVAL WE NOW HAVE (BEFORE IT IS RESCINDED) AND GET ALL POSSIBLE EQUIPMENT WHICH IS TO LEAVE THAILAND OUT OF HERE SOONEST. WE WILL UNDOUBTEDLY TAKE SOME LUMPS BUT I AM CONVINCED ALTERNATIVES ARE WORSE.

4. WE ARE "NO COMMENTING" PRESS QUERIES REGARDING DISPOSITION OF THIS EQUIPMENT. I HOPE WASHINGTON SPOKESMEN WILL SIMILARLY AVOID STATEMENT WHICH WOULD ADD TO THE IMPRESSION SOME ELEMENTS HERE ARE TRYING TO CREATE THAT THERE IS A MAJOR CONFRONTATION BETWEEN THE TWO GOVERNMENTS ON THIS ISSUE.

5. THE WAY THIS SITUATION IS DEVELOPING MAKES IT ALL THE MORE IMPORTANT THAT WE BE ABLE TO HELP OUR FRIENDS IN THE RTG BY LEAVING HERE THE EQUIPMENT, MUCH OF WHICH IS NOT WORTH MOVING, IDENTIFIED IN BANGKOK 7976. THE SUPREME COMMAND HAS REALLY COME THROUGH ON THIS IN THE FACE OF CONSIDERABLE POLITICAL OPPOSITION. IT IS MOST IMPORTANT FOR OUR CONTINUED WORKING RELATIONS WITH THEM ON A HOST OF IMPORTANT MATTERS, AS WELL AS FOR OUR INTERESTS IN THAILAND GENERALLY, THAT WE BE ABLE TO PASS TO THEM THIS EQUIPMENT WHICH THEY NEED AND CAN USE EFFECTIVELY. TIME IS IMPORTANT. I HOPE I MAY HAVE IMMEDIATE WASHINGTON APPROVAL TO INFORM THE THAI MILITARY THAT, TO SHOW OUR GOOD FAITH TOWARD THEM, WE WILL TURN OVER TO THEM THOSE EXCESS ITEMS WE HAVE RECOMMENDED IN OUR EARLIER MESSAGE. IF THE THAI MILITARY KNOW THE EQUIPMENT IS THEIRS, THEY WILL HANDLE THE CIVILIAN SIDE OF THE GOVERNMENT. MASTERS

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